

Message Text

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17

ACTION AF-04

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 EUR-08 INR-05 EB-03 L-01 SP-02

PM-03 H-01 PA-01 PRS-01 CIAE-00 NSC-05 NSCE-00 DODE-00

MMS-01 RSC-01 /051 W

----- 104064

R 201351Z JAN 75 ZFG

FM AMEMBASSY NAIROBI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 987

INFO AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY PORT LOUIS

DET 4 AFSCF MAHE ISLAND SEYCHELLES

C O N F I D E N T I A L NAIROBI 0540

LIMDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT PFOR SE UK OAU XO MARR

SUBJECT: SEYCHELLES CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCE AND POSSIBLE
RETURN OF CERTAIN BIOT ISLANDS

REFS: (A) NAIROBI 152, (B) PORT LOUIS 16 (NOTAL)

1. IN COURSE OF VISIT TO SEYCHELLES JANUARY 15-18,
DCM LEARNED FROM CONVERSATIONS WITH LEADERS OF TWO
POLITICAL PARTIES AND GOVERNOR THAT SEYCHELLES CONSTITU-
TIONAL CONFERENCE WILL MOST LIKELY TAKE PLACE IN LONDON
IN MARCH OR APRIL. PRINCIPAL REASON FOR CONTINUING
UNCERTAINTY RE TIMING OF CONFERENCE IS THAT
CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCE ON RHODESIA (PERHAPS IN MARCH)
WOULD PROBABLY PRE-EMPT CONFERENCE ON SEYCHELLES AS
SAME U.K. EXPERTS WOULD BE NEEDED FOR BOTH CONFERENCES.

2. OPPOSITION SPUP PARTY CHIEF RENE PLANS TO ATTEND
CONFERENCE AND TO PUSH HARD FOR RETURN TO SEYCHELLES OF
THREE ISLANDS DETACHED FROM SEYCHELLES WHEN BIOT WAS
FORMED IN 1965 -- ALDABRA, FARQUHAR, AND ILE DESROCHES.

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ALTHOUGH CHIEF MINISTER MANCHAM FEELS LESS STRONGLY ON

SUBJECT AND WOULD PROBABLY BE WILLING TO SETTLE FOR FISHING, TOURISM, AND MINERAL RIGHTS IN ENLARGED ARCHIPELAGO WHICH WOULD RESULT FROM INCLUSION OF THESE THREE ISLANDS IN HIS COUNTRY, HE WILL BE MOST RELUCTANT TO BE POLITICALLY OUT-FLANKED BY RENE ON AN ISSUE WHICH WOULD HAVE APPEAL IN OAU CIRCLES AS WELL AS AT HOME. DEPARTMENT SHOULD RECALL THAT MANCHAM COMPLETELY REVERSED HIMSELF IN 1974 AND ADOPTED OPPOSITION PARTY POSITION ON INDEPENDENCE AND, IN OUR VIEW, WOULD BE QUITE CAPABLE OF MAKING ANALOGOUS SHIFT TO PRESS VIGOROUSLY FOR UNRESTRICTED RETURN OF THREE ISLANDS.

3. INASMUCH AS ISSUE OF BIOT ISLANDS WILL APPARENTLY ARISE AT SEYCHELLES CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCE, WE BELIEVE THAT USG POSITION ON RETURN OF ISLANDS TO SEYCHELLES SHOULD BE FORMULATED WELL BEFORE CONFERENCE AND COMMUNICATED TO UKG AND PERHAPS TO MANCHAM AS WELL. SEYCHELLES GOVERNOR TOLD DCM THAT HE HAS REQUESTED THAT UKG CONSULT WITH USG ON POSSIBLE RETURN OF BIOT ISLANDS, BUT HAS HAD NO CONFIRMATION SUCH CONSULTATIONS HAVE BEGUN. GOVERNOR, WHO IS ALSO ADMINISTRATOR FOR BIOT, EXPRESSED OPINION THAT ONLY DIEGO GARCIA IS OF REAL MILITARY VALUE AND THREE ISLANDS DETACHED FROM SEYCHELLES ARE UNLIKELY TO BE OF MILITARY SIGNIFICANCE IN FUTURE.

4. AS NOTED IN REF A, AND COMMENTED ON IN REF B, EFFECT ON FUTURE OF DIEGO GARCIA OF RETURN OF OTHER BIOT ISLANDS TO SEYCHELLES WOULD APPEAR TO BE MOST IMPORTANT U.S. CONCERN. IF OUR PRESENCE ON DIEGO GARCIA WOULD NOT BE JEOPARDIZED AND IF GOVERNOR'S VIEWS ON OTHER ISLANDS' LACK OF MILITARY POTENTIAL ARE CORRECT, WE WOULD BE INCLINED TO SUPPORT IDEA OF RETURNING ISLANDS TO SEYCHELLES WITHOUT RESTRICTION AND TO GAIN FUTURE GOOD WILL BY SO INFORMING MANCHAM OF THIS BEFORE CONFERENCE. WE WOULD BE GLAD TO PASS THIS OR OTHER MESSAGE TO MANCHAM ON INSTRUCTIONS FROM DEPARTMENT.
MARSHALL

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: Z
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: INDEPENDENCE, CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION, ISLAND CLAIMS, DIEGO GARCIA, MILITARY BASES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 20 JAN 1975
Decaption Date: 28 MAY 2004
Decaption Note: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: GolinoFR
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1975NAIROB00540
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D750022-0110
From: NAIROBI
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1975/newtext/t19750137/aaaabgox.tel
Line Count: 98
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: LIMDIS
Reference: 75 NAIROBI 152, 75 PORT LOUIS 16
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: GolinoFR
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 25 JUN 2003
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <25 JUN 2003 by ShawDG>; APPROVED <26 JUN 2003 by GolinoFR>
Review Markings:

Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
05 JUL 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SEYCHELLES CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCE AND POSSIBLE RETURN OF CERTAIN BIOT ISLANDS
TAGS: PINT, PFOR, MARR, SE, UK, XO, OAU
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 05 JUL 2006